

California Rangeland Trust Sierra Nevada Rangeland Assessment Project

2. PROJECT SUMMARY

The California Rangeland Trust (CRT) is a California non-profit corporation whose mission is to conserve the open space, natural habitat and stewardship provided by California ranches. The Rangeland Trust currently holds conservation easements on over 178,000 acres throughout California. Of that, 28,282 acres are located within the Sierra Nevada region, and was achieved by collaborating with organizations such as the Wildlife Conservation Board, The Nature Conservancy and Sierra Business Council.

The Rangeland Trust requests a grant to hire a certified range manager familiar with the Sierra Nevada region to conduct an assessment of the resources on 12 to 16 ranches including watersheds, streams, rivers, wildlife habitat, rangeland, cultural and historical resources. The project is called the California Rangeland Trust Sierra Nevada Rangeland Assessment Project. This analysis will guide CRT in prioritizing ranches with the highest environmental value and economic benefit to the Sierra Nevada region. The Rangeland Trust will then prioritize the ranches selecting the most strategic working cattle ranches to apply for grant funding for the acquisition of a conservation easement. The assessment will help leverage commitments from one agency for matching funds from the others, and to identify potential strategic partnerships with other land trusts in the Sierra Nevada Conservancy area to further leverage resources. The acquisition funding will be requested from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy as well as the Wildlife Conservation Board, the Department of Conservation, the Department of Water Resources and any other appropriate state and federal agency.

The budget for the assessment project would be \$1,500 to \$5,500 per ranch, for a total request of \$49,500. This will include a report to the Conservancy on the assessment.

The Rangeland Trust has accepted applications from willing ranch owners who each have contacted CRT to help them obtain a conservation easement over their respective ranch. These lands are located in the following subregions of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy: East Sierra, North Central Sierra, North Sierra, South Central Sierra and South Sierra. The ranches range in size from 600 acres to 14,500 acres, for a total of nearly 50,000 acres. Currently, CRT does not have the internal technical capacity to conduct an important assessment of the Sierras' resources. The assessment would provide CRT guidance in applying for grants to obtain easements on these ranches. Hiring a certified range manager to conduct the assessment of the Sierra ranches would build critical capacity for the organization.

A conservation easement on a Sierra Nevada ranch will permanently protect the rivers, streams and watersheds that flow through the ranch, as well as the wildlife and the magnificent vistas that define the region. In addition, conservation of working ranches will have a direct benefit for the economy of the Sierra Nevada region by supporting the economic viability of those ranches and helping to maintain the critical mass of productive rangeland necessary to sustain agriculture in the area. Often the conservation of a strategic ranch will lead other ranchers in the area to seek conservation, thereby expanding conservation in key areas of the Sierra Nevada.

California Rangeland Trust has the opportunity to conserve many more acres of unique Sierra Nevada rangeland in perpetuity with a grant from Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Without funds to support this important work, the ranches will continue to be under threat of subdivision and conversion to nonagricultural uses.